

House Republican Press Release

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Representative Frey: Contract Awarded For Route 7 Project



Construction Finally Ready To Begin, Says Ridgefield Legislator

State Representative John H. Frey, R-Ridgefield, today announced the State Department of Transportation (DOT) has awarded Tilcon Inc., of New Britain, CT, (the apparent low-bidder) a \$16 million contract to begin the Phase 1 of the Route 7 widening/reconstruction project. The project involves widening Route 7 from Route 35 in Ridgefield, northerly to the existing interchange at Wooster Heights Road in Danbury (at Interstate 84). The initiative will widen the two-lane roadway to four lanes and improve intersections at Starrs Plain Road, West Starrs Plain Road and Bennetts Farm Road.

Phase one will comprise a 1-mile section, beginning in Ridgefield, with construction expected to start in late May 2005 and be completed within 18 months. The second phase of the project, which will comprise the remaining 2.6 miles, is tentatively scheduled to begin in 2008 and take two to three years to complete, with a \$20 million cost. The state will contribute \$29 million for the total cost of both phases, with the federal government paying the remaining \$7 million.

Rep. Frey, who serves as an Assistant Minority Leader, is largely credited with jump-starting the long-stalled project along. In April 2003, he held a 'summit' meeting in former Governor Rowland's office with senior members of his staff as well as appropriate employees of the Department of Environment Protection and the Department of Transportation. At this meeting, a month-by-month schedule of accountability was agreed to by all parties, a schedule that Rep. Frey has been closely monitoring.

"The awarding of this contract means that finally, a shovel will soon be going in the ground to begin construction," said Rep. Frey, who also serves on the Legislature's Transportation Bonding Subcommittee. "People in western Connecticut have endured capacity problems on Route 7 for far too long because the project became mired in state bureaucracy."

A 'Super 7' highway was first conceived in 1949. The state Department of Transportation began planning widening Route 7 from Ridgefield to Danbury in 1978. Bureaucratic delays, lack of funding and opposition in affected communities actually resulted in the plans being abandoned in 1995, said Rep. Frey.

After the plan was revived several years later, there were additional delays. In 2004, legislation authorizing federal funds became bogged down, said Rep. Frey. When federal funds did become available, the increase in construction costs since the contract was originally approved resulted in its nullification.

“Fortunately, obtaining funding for the first phase is no longer an issue,” said Rep. Frey. “When completed, the renovations will reduce traffic congestion and improve the quality of life for Ridgefielders and others in the region. The inconvenience of construction will be well worth the end result.”

The first phase of the project will include widening from Route 35 to just north of the Indian Trading Post, including and installation of a traffic signal at the intersection of Bennetts Farm Road. Rep. Frey said that as a result of his meetings with DOT, two lanes of traffic will be open at all times and the work will be scheduled for evening hours.